

METADATA GRAPHICAL USER INTERFACE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5

1. Field Of The Invention

The present invention generally relates to the generation of metadata objects (i.e., data for describing data objects). The present invention specifically relates to a graphical user interface for facilitating the development and modification of metadata. In the context of the present invention, metadata objects may refer to instances of classes persisted to a file, relational or object-oriented database or simply rows in tables in a relational database.

15 2. Description Of The Related Art

Data driven programs known in the art import data objects associated metadata objects from files or databases. The development of the metadata objects is typically accomplished by one of two methods. The first method entails a direct creation and storage of data objects and associated metadata objects on file(s) or in database(s). This method suffers from two major drawbacks. First, an inordinate amount of time is normally required to create the data objects and the metadata objects. Second, the metadata objects as stored are not easily modifiable.

The second method entails a programming of a customized graphical user interface for generating and storing the data objects and associated metadata objects on file(s) or in database(s). This method suffers from a drawback of the complexity and effort of programming a customized graphical user interface.

What is therefore needed is a method and a computer for facilitating the development and modification of metadata objects.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a metadata graphical user interface that overcomes the disadvantages associated with the prior art. Various aspects of the invention are novel and non-obvious. While the actual nature
5 of the present invention covered herein can only be determined with reference to the claims appended hereto, certain features, which are characteristic of the embodiments disclosed herein, are described briefly as follows.

One form of the present invention is a method for generating metadata
10 objects. A spreadsheet including metadata information is displayed, and a command for triggering a conversion of the metadata information into a comma separated value file is provided.

A second form of the present invention is a computer for generating
15 metadata objects. The computer comprises means for displaying a spreadsheet including metadata information, and means for providing a command to trigger a conversion of the metadata information into a comma separated value file.

A third form of the present invention is a computer program product in
20 a computer readable medium for generating metadata objects. The computer program product comprises computer readable code for displaying a spreadsheet including metadata information, and computer readable code for providing a command to trigger a conversion of the metadata information into a comma separated value file.

The foregoing forms and other forms, features and advantages of the
25 present invention will become further apparent from the following detailed description of the presently preferred embodiments, read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. The detailed description and drawings are merely illustrative of the invention rather than limiting, the scope of the invention being defined by the appended claims and equivalents thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment in accordance with the present invention of computer hardware employed in the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of one embodiment in accordance with the present invention of computer software employed in the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a flow chart of one embodiment of a metadata object generation routine implemented by the **FIG. 1** computer hardware and the **FIG. 2** computer software; and

FIG. 4 is an exemplary worksheet including a metadata directive column and a metadata information grid.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of one embodiment in accordance with the present invention of computer hardware employed in the present invention;

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENTLY PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A computer **20** of the present invention is shown in **FIG. 1**. Referring to **FIG. 1**, computer **20** may be configured in any form for accepting structured inputs, processing the inputs in accordance with prescribed rules, and outputting the processing results as would occur to those having ordinary skill in the art, such as, for example, a personal computer, a workstation, a super computer, a mainframe computer, a minicomputer, a super minicomputer, or a microcomputer. Computer **20** preferably includes a bus **21** for facilitating electrical communication among one or more central processing units (CPU) **22**, a read-only memory (ROM) **23**, a random access memory (RAM) **24**, an input/output (I/O) controller **25**, a disk controller **26**, a communication controller **27**, and a user interface controller **28**.

Each CPU **22** is preferably one of the Intel families of microprocessors, one of the AMD families of microprocessors, one of the Motorola families of microprocessors, or one of the various versions of a Reduced Instruction Set Computer microprocessor such as the PowerPC chip manufactured by IBM. ROM **23** stores controlling programs for operating controllers **25-28**, such as, for example, the Basic Input-Output Computer (BIOS) developed by IBM. RAM **24** is the memory for loading an operating computer and selectively loading application programs.

Controller **25** is an aggregate of controllers for facilitating an interaction between each CPU **22** and pointing devices such as a mouse **30** and a keyboard **31**, and between each CPU **22** and output devices such as a printer **32** and a fax **33**. Controller **26** is an aggregate of controllers for facilitating an interaction between each CPU **22** and data storage devices such as disks drives **34** in the form of a hard drive, a floppy drive, and a compact-disc drive.

The hard drive stores a conventional operating computer, such as, for example, IBM's AIX operating computer or OS/2 operating computer, and application programs.

Controller **27** is an aggregate of controllers for facilitating an interaction between each CPU **22** and a network **35**, and between CPU **22** and an external database **36**. Controller **28** is an aggregate of controllers for facilitating an interaction between each CPU **22** and a graphic display device such as a monitor **37**, and between each CPU **22** and an audio device such as a speaker **38**.

Those having skill in the art will appreciate alternative embodiments of a computer, particularly other embodiments of computer **20**, for implementing the principles of the present invention.

Referring additionally to **FIG. 2**, a spreadsheet program **40**, a comma separated value (CSV) converter **42**, and a metadata importer **43** are computer programs physically stored within the hard drive and uploaded to RAM **23** whereby the hard drive and RAM **22** are computer readable mediums that electrically, magnetically, optically or chemically altered to carry computer readable information. Concurrently or alternatively, spreadsheet program **40**, CSV converter **42**, and metadata importer **43** can be stored in other computer readable mediums of computer **20** (e.g., the CD-ROM drive of hard drives **34**), or in a memory of another computer whereby spreadsheet program **40**, CSV converter **42**, and metadata importer **43** can be accessed via network **35**. In other embodiments, spreadsheet program **40**, CSV converter **42**, and metadata importer **43** can be partially or fully implemented with digital circuitry, analog circuitry, or both.

Referring additionally to **FIG. 3**, a metadata object generation routine **50** as implemented by spreadsheet program **40**, CSV converter **42**, and metadata importer **43** will now be described herein. While the implementation of routine **50** is described by a descriptive interaction of spreadsheet **40**, CSV converter **42**, and metadata importer **43** in terms of data transfers, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate the physical elements of computer **20** that are associated with the implementation of routine **50**.

During a stage **S52** of routine **50**, a graphical user interface (GUI) **41** of spreadsheet program **40** displays a spreadsheet including one or more worksheets on monitor **37**. Each worksheet supports the standard spreadsheet user interface metaphor (e.g., cells, values, etc.) and is exportable into a comma separated value (CSV) format. Additionally, each worksheet can support cell formulas and cell references. In one embodiment, spreadsheet program **40** is a version of the EXCEL spreadsheet program from Microsoft Corporation that has been modified to include GUI **41** under the principles of the present invention.

10 An exemplary display of a worksheet **60** is shown in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 4**, worksheet **60** includes a menu bar **61**, a toolbar **62**, a metadata directive column **63**, and a metadata information grid **64**. Menu bar **61** has a menu item **60a** and toolbar **62** has an icon **62a**. Menu item **61a** and icon **62a** are for selectively activating CVS converter **42** as will be subsequently described herein in connection with a stage **S56** of routine **50**. Metadata directive column **63** includes cells **C1-C10** for displaying inputted metadata directives **MDD** as will be subsequently described herein in connection with a stage **S54** of routine **50**. Metadata information grid **64** includes cells **C11-C60** for displaying inputted metadata information **MDI** as will be subsequently described herein in connection with stage **S54** of routine **50**. Metadata directive column **63** and metadata information grid **64** are vertically aligned along rows **R1-R10** with metadata directive column **63** being displayed under column **COL A** and metadata information grid **64** being displayed under columns **COL B-COL F**. Alternatively, metadata directive column **63** can be inserted within or positioned after metadata information grid **64**; or metadata direction column **62** can be omitted with metadata directives inserted within metadata information grid **64**.

Referring to **FIGS. 1-4**, during stage **S54** of routine **50**, spreadsheet program **40** conventionally receives metadata information **MDI** from a user of computer **20** via keyboard **31** or a storage device such as one of the disk drives **34**, and GUI **41** inputs the metadata information **MDI** in corresponding
5 cells of a displayed worksheet. For example, when worksheet **60** is displayed is displayed on monitor **37**, GUI **41** displays metadata information **MDI** in each cell of cells **C11-C60** of metadata information grid **64** that corresponds to the input of the metadata information **MDI**.

Metadata directives **MDD** are storage instructions for metadata
10 importer **43** as will be subsequently described herein in connection with stage **S58** of routine **50**. The following TABLE 1 includes exemplary metadata directives **MDD** with a corresponding name, syntax and function:

TABLE 1

METADATA DIRECTIVE	NAME	SYNTAX	FUNCTION
*	Comment	* <comment>	Remainder of row is ignored.
K	Copy	K LIST >list1> FROM LIST <list2>	Copy all of the elements of list2 to list1.
M	Mandate	M SIZE <list1> = SIZE <list2>	Generate a warning if the lengths of list 1 and list 2 are not the same.
R	Replace	R LIST <list> POSITION <n> ELEMENT <element>	Make <element> the nth element in <list>.
S	Sort	S<list>	Sort <list> according to display text of its elements.
X	End	X	Marks last row of metadata information.

When metadata importer **43** is designed to follow metadata directives **MDD**, spreadsheet program **40** will receive any input of one or more metadata directives **MDD** from a user of computer **20** or a storage device such as one of the disk drives **34**, and GUI **41** displays the metadata directive(s) **MDD** in
 5 corresponding cell(s) of a displayed worksheet. For example, when worksheet **60** is displayed on monitor **37**, GUI **41** displays metadata directives **MDD** in each cell of cells **C1-C10** of metadata directive column **63** that corresponds to the input of the metadata directives **MDD**.

During stage **S56** of routine **50**, in response to a conversion command
 10 **CC**, CVS converter **42** conventionally converts the displayed spreadsheet into a comma separated value file **CSVF**. In one embodiment, a end of line marker is placed in the last column of every row in the worksheet to ensure that the correct number of commas are written into the comma separated value file **CSVF**. For example, when worksheet **60** is displayed on monitor
 15 **37**, a user of computer **20** can use mouse **30** to sort through menu item **61a** or activate icon item **62a** to thereby provide conversion command **CC** to converter **42**. The following TABLE 2 illustrates the contents of each line of comma separated value file **CSVF** when worksheet **60** is displayed:

TABLE 2

LINE	CONTENTS
1	C1, C11, C12, C13, C14, C15
2	C2, C16, C17, C18, C19, C20
3	C3, C21, C22, C23, C24, C25
4	C4, C26, C27, C28, C29, C30
5	C5, C31, C32, C33, C34, C35
6	C6, C36, C37, C38, C39, C40
7	C7, C41, C42, C43, C44, C45
8	C8, C46, C47, C48, C49, C50
9	C9, C51, C52, C53, C54, C55
10	C10, C56, C57, C58, C59, C60

During stage **S58** of routine **50**, metadata importer **43** conventionally generates metadata objects **MDO** from the metadata information **MDI** within comma separated value file **CSVF** and stores the metadata objects **MDO** within one of disk drives **34**, a data storage device accessible through network **35**, or database **36**. In one embodiment, when only metadata information **MDI** is within comma separated value file **CSVF**, importer **43** is programmed to parse the comma separated value file **CSVF** to thereby generate the metadata objects **MDO**. In an alternative embodiment, when metadata information **MDI** and metadata directives **MDD** are within comma separated value file **CSVF**, importer **43** is programmed to identify the metadata directives **MDD** within comma separated value file **CSVF** and to parse metadata information **MDI** within comma separated value file **CSV** in accordance with the metadata directives **MDD** to thereby generate the metadata objects **MDO**.

15 Routine **50** is terminated upon completion of stage **S58**. Subsequently, the spreadsheet including the metadata information **MDI** and/or metadata directives **MDD** can be stored for future modifications.

20 While the embodiments of the present invention disclosed herein are presently considered to be preferred, various changes and modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. The scope of the invention is indicated in the appended claims, and all changes that come within the meaning and range of equivalents are intended to be embraced therein.